



WEBSITE UPDATE, SOUTHEAST CONFERENCE UNITED CHURCH OF CHRIST

March 28-29, 2010

CELEBRATIONS

Diantha Brown Installed as Pastor of First United UCC, Belvidere, TN March 14

Diantha Brown, formerly a member of Pleasant Hill Community Church, UCC, TN, was formally installed as the pastor of First United UCC, Belvidere, at 3:00 p.m. on March 14. The sanctuary was filled with visitors from across the Conference, with many well-wishers from Pleasant Hill. The charge to the pastor was given by Tom Warren, pastor of Pleasant Hill Community UCC, and the charge to the congregation by Barbara Everett, who was elected as the first woman president of the consistory of First United over 20 years ago. Conference Minister Tim Downs preached the sermon.

Leslie Etheredge Installed as Associate Minister of Church of the Savior, UCC, Knoxville, on March 7

Leslie Etheredge, a graduate of Memphis Theological Seminary and formerly a member of First Congregational UCC, Memphis, was installed as associate minister for education and youth at Church of the Savior, UCC, Knoxville, on March 7.

Southeast Conference Youth Ministry Leaders to go to Cleveland in April

The national office of the United Church of Christ is hosting a church-wider meeting of youth ministry leaders at the church headquarters in April. The Southeast Conference is proud to send some of our gifted youth ministry leadership to be a part of this trip. Going from our conference are Louellen Benton from Holy Trinity Community UCC, Nashville; Ginnie Ferrell, from Central Congregational UCC, Atlanta; Aaron Carter, from Victory Church, UCC, Stone Mountain, GA; and Heidi Schuler, from Pilgrimage UCC, Marietta, GA.

Roy Bain of Lanett Congregational Christian Church Prepares for Retirement in April

Roy Bain celebrated his nineteen years of ministry at the Congregational Christian Church of Lanett, AL, at a tea held on March 21st. At the tea, the

Conference and East Alabama-West Georgia Association presented gifts recognizing Roy's leadership shared with the United Church of Christ through the years. Wanda and Roy Bain have built a home in North Alabama to which they will retire.

Jim Deming, Nashville, Called to National UCC Position

We just received word that Jim Deming, interim pastor at First United UCC, Nashville, has received a call to serve as the minister for environmental justice for the United Church of Christ. Our congratulations to Jim on the occasion of this call. Prior to serving First United as interim, Jim has served as interim minister at Brookmeade Congregational UCC, Nashville.

Associations of the Southeast Conference Look Ahead to New Ways of Authorizing Ministries

The Georgia-South Carolina and Alabama-Tennessee associations are beginning to live into new ways of preparing candidates for licensed and ordained ministries. The process called "Multiple Paths to Ministry" invites candidates for ministry to become "members in discernment" as opposed to the former category of "students in care." The process allows for the recognition of a candidate's experience and education in the entirety to be considered as a part of preparation to ministry, and not simply work on a Master's of Divinity degree. Currently one candidate in the Alabama-Tennessee Association has been accepted as a member in discernment for recognition of ordination. This candidate is Cynthia Andrews-Looper, pastor of Holy Trinity Community UCC in Nashville. In addition, two candidates in Alabama have expressed an interest in being accepted as members in discernment. In the Georgia-South Carolina Association, two candidates have already completed this process toward ordination, Andy Sidden and Candace Chellew-Hodges of Garden of Grace UCC, Columbia, SC. In addition, three other candidates have been accepted as members in discernment. They are as follows:

Jennifer Spears of Garden of Grace UCC, Columbia, as she seeks a license for ministry

Bryan Edney of Victory Church, Stone Mountain, GA, who is preparing to enroll in Columbia Theological Seminary, Decatur, GA, preparing for ordination

Diane Bowden of Rush Memorial Congregational UCC, Atlanta, who is enrolling at the Interdenominational Theological Center, Atlanta.

Donna Papenhausen Transfers Into Georgia-South Carolina Association

The request of Donna Papenhausen, a member of Pilgrimage UCC, Marietta, GA, to transfer her ordained ministerial standing from Florida to the Georgia-South Carolina Association was accepted on March 13. Prior to Florida, she was active in the Connecticut Conference. She will continue on leave of absence from ministry.

LIFTING UP ...

Charlie Lord, Mental Ward Photographer and Activist, Dies at Age 90

UCC minister Charlie Lord, a member of Pleasant Hill Community UCC, TN, died following an extended illness on January 30. As a conscientious objector during World War II, Charlie served in a mental hospital in Pennsylvania, where he took photographs that were published in *Life* magazine. These photo were so scandalous they resulted in changes to the treatment for the mentally ill in the United States ...

Johnny Mingus, Retired from Pilgrim Congregational UCC, Chattanooga, Sends Greetings

Johnny wrote to us from retirement in Florida. He has been diagnosed with Lou Gehrig's disease, or ALS. Wheelchair bound, Johnny continues to be active running the household, being the at-home dad for Isaac and Samuel, and speaking as an advocate for ALS patients. A work crew of friends came to assist in making the house accessible following Johnny's confinement to a wheelchair.

Michael Grello, a Vital Member of TAP

On Wednesday, March 23, 2010, members of Garden of Grace United Church of Christ in Columbia, SC celebrated the life the Michael Grello, who died earlier that week. "Mike was a vital member of our TAP group from the very beginning," said Jennifer Spears. "He always gave us a different way of looking at things. You could count on him to make you think." Other members of the TAP group, as well as fellow congregants, remembered Mike for his hunger for learning and unwavering commitment to social justice. Mike was not only a theologian "among" the people, and "of" the people, but always a theologian "for" the people. He passed away during the course on the Hebrew prophets and social transformation, and will be remembered for his own prophetic imagination.

FEATURE FOCUS

"TRANSFORMING"

Campaign Visitors Contact Every Church in the Conference

As a part of the Transforming Churches, Transforming Lives Campaign for the Southeast Conference visitors have contacted every church in the Conference to invite them to be a part of this initiative to strengthen and build our ministries. We have asked visitors to share reflections on their experiences. Many have reported that it is exciting for them to get to know other churches in the Conference and hearing stories about their ministries.

One visitor reported, “I met with a group of leaders, one of whom said after hearing the presentation, ‘what an opportunity for our church! We can strengthen our identity as a UCC church, retire our debt, do the work we need to do on our sanctuary, and build up the Conference which wants to help us become even stronger!’” One leader understood that this was not just a campaign about the Conference; it was a campaign about all of us ... we are the Conference together.

Another visitors reflected on her visit to two of our historically American Missionary Association churches. She said, “It gave me a special sense of pride as I sat in the sanctuaries of these two African-American churches. I could not help but feel the presence of proud, courageous African-Americans who paved the way for me to enjoy the freedoms with which I am blessed. I came away from these meetings having received much more than a positive commitment of support for the Campaign. I was deeply moved by the depth of the allegiance these small congregations have for our Conference.”

Visiting a small church in South Alabama, another reported, “We met a pastor who is really isolated from any other UCC congregation. In spite of this isolation, he said: ‘no matter what comes or goes, I’ll die a proud member of the UCC!’ At the end of the visit, I left that I had been in a family reunion with a long-lost cousin. Thank you for giving me the opportunity to visit.”

Many people spotted themselves in the video that has been made for the Campaign. Members of one new church start saw videos of themselves, and understood in new ways that they were full and important members of the Conference. Some were hesitant when the visitor first approached them, but they recognized that this campaign was about them, supporting them, and building other churches like theirs. Their church is the presence of the United Church of Christ in their part of the state. Together, many are discovering that this is not a campaign about a “them,” far away, but it is about us, and how we are church faithfully together in “such a time as this.”

UCC HISTORY AND POLITY CLASS, A FIRST ONLINE!

On March 6, 25 people gathered for the first UCC History and Polity class offered by the Southeast Conference to be offered in a distance-learning format. The course is being offered in conjunction with the Candler School of Theology and the Center for Progressive Renewal On-line University. The format includes two days of face-to-face meetings, with the rest of the interaction happening over the Internet in collaborative learning groups. The opening session was held in Atlanta to provide an orientation to the technology and to introduce the class to Kathy Clark, the facilitator; Gregg Carlson, the IT support guru, and to Tim Downs, the conference minister, as well as to each other. It was a time of sharing among a class of ordained clergy, seminarians, and lay theology students who seek to learn more about the UCC. The 25 students hail from regions around the Conference and include participants from as far away as California, Ohio, and Oregon.

SEC PARTNERSHIP WITH LANCASTER THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY

Southeast Conference Continues Partnership with Lancaster Theological Seminary to Build Global Church Leaders

We are pleased to announce that the Henry Luce Foundation has awarded a grant in the amount of \$350,000 to Lancaster Theological Seminary and the Southeast Conference to fund a three-year project entitled "Equipping Leaders to Serve in a Religiously Pluralistic World." Building on the initial and highly successful TAP Global Theological Education in 2008, this grant will fund a three-year collaboration between the seminary and the TAP program for travel to Thailand. Under the auspices of the Institute of Religion, Culture and Peace of Payap University in Chiang Mai, Thailand, the group will be engaged in inter- and intra-faith conversation, as well as conflict transformation and peace building. There will be two trips to Thailand, in 2011 and 2012, and opportunities for retreats and reflections before and after the trips. In addition, the grant will provide for doctoral students in peace studies at Payap University to come to the United States for study and travel, and provide opportunities for faculty and clergy sabbaticals in Thailand.

This grant is a part of the Southeast Conference living into a deeper relationship with a rapidly globalizing church. Conference Minister Tim Downs noted, "This conference has a long history of supporting mission passionately. We are now given an opportunity to live out a 21st-century understanding of what it means to be a global partner in mission. We not only have much to bring to our global partners in mission, we have much to learn" ...

SOUTHEAST CONFERENCE BOARD OF DIRECTORS HIGHLIGHTS

Meeting Held January 22, 2010, Knoxville, TN

These are the highlights of the Southeast Conference Board of Directors meeting:

Gerri Hudson reported that the Friends of the Conference Campaign has resulted in over \$15,000 in gifts; \$11,800 to OCWM Basic Support; \$1,800 to TAP, and \$1,300 to New Church Development.

Cameron Trimble reported on the proposed partnership between the Southeast Conference and the newly-formed Center for Progressive Renewal. A contract between the Center and the Conference will soon be signed to allow our new church development to continue under their auspices.

The Nominating Committee of the Conference reported that Marcia Bentley, member of First Congregational Christian Church UCC, Birmingham, has been nominated to serve as the Southeast Conference representative to the Board of Directors of Wider Church Ministries of the United Church of Christ. In this position Marcia will also serve on the Board of Directors of the Southeast Conference.

The Board received a report for Michael Stroud, of United Church, UCC, Huntsville, AL, who is undertaking the History Project, a written history of the Southeast Conference in time for its fiftieth anniversary celebration in 2016. Michael has been traveling extensively throughout the Conference interviewing people and doing comprehensive research through the archives of the Conference in preparation for this writing. The Board expressed its deep appreciation for Michael's hard work.

THE CENTER FOR PROGRESSIVE RENEWAL—WEBINARS

The Center for Progressive Renewal (CPR) is dedicated to renewing progressive Christianity by training new entrepreneurial leaders, supporting the birth of new liberal/progressive congregations, and by renewing and strengthening existing progressive churches. One way we do this is by offering “webinars” to both clergy and lay people. Taught by some of the most dynamic voices from within the United Church of Christ, webinars are inexpensive, online learning opportunities covering a variety of topics in the areas of church growth, church revitalization, executive leadership, and judicatory resources. Teachers include the Rev. Cameron Trimble, co-Executive Director of CPS; the Rev. Sid Fowler, spiritual formation consultant; and Rick and Jill Edens, co-pastors of United Church of Chapel Hill, NC.

In May, the Rev. Michael Piazza, CPR co-Executive Directors, will present "Progressive Renewal." Based on his book *Prophetic Renewal: Hope for the Liberal Church*, which tells the story of the mistakes made, lessons learned and successes achieved during his time as senior pastor of the Cathedral of Hope, this webinar will inspire pastors to reclaim as a badge of honor the label "liberal." Upcoming topics from popular international trainer, motivational speaker and retreat facilitator Gwen Thomas include "Living Out the ONA Commitment" and "Coping Tips for Tough Times."

Late last year, Coy James, Director of Stewardship for the Cathedral of Hope UCC in Dallas, TX, presented "21st-Century Stewardship: Best Practices for Fundraising with New Technology." Demand was so high, that we were forced to schedule the webinar for a second time. More than 80 people signed up to hear how this relatively young congregation has used technology to build relationships with contributors and achieved its funding goals without endowments, investments, or rental income. As one participant later commended, "Thank you for an outstanding program! Wow, am I inspired to get to work with my church!" ...

NEWS AROUND THE CONFERENCE

United Church, Huntsville, AL, Prepares for 50th Anniversary

United Church, Huntsville, AL, will celebrate its 50th anniversary October 2-3, 2010. There will be a special worship service with appearances by former pastors, and a celebration of its recent growth. One of the first congregations established by the Congregational Christian and Evangelical and Reformed home mission boards acting together, it was the first church of this combined effort in the Conference.

Kirkwood UCC, Atlanta, Featured in UCC Strengthen the Church

Offering Materials

Kirkwood UCC, in Atlanta, led by Susannah Davis, was featured as a part of a bulletin insert promoting the Strengthen the Church offering of the United Church of Christ. Begun in 2007, the church now worships at over 100 each Sunday, and is in the first steps of securing a permanent building. The Conference has applied for a loan to purchase a building for the congregation, given their rapid growth. Kirkwood UCC began in a coffee shop. The church offers radical hospitality, and is reaching people who have little or no church experience.

A Word from Tougaloo College

Tougaloo College, one of the six historically black colleges affiliated with the UCC, and located near Jackson, MS, is the home to Union Chapel, the only

UCC church in Mississippi at this time. The College recently named Dr. Beverly Wade Hogan as its first woman president. It is consistently listed as one of the best colleges in the Southeast ...

A WORD FROM TIM DOWNS

Dear Friends,

On Easter morning many of us will gather for a sunrise service, and as dawn breaks, we will say together, "Oh, Death, where is your victory, Death, where is your sting? Thanks be to God who gives us victory through our Lord Jesus Christ!" Ours is a faith of deep promise, a promise that death and brokenness will not have the final word, a promise that life and hope will prevail, and the evidence is that the stone is rolled away, the tomb is empty.

One of the joys of my ministry has been the growing relationships we are developing with congregations across the South who are seeking connection with and support from the United Church of Christ. These affiliating churches are the source of much of our vitality as a conference. They are drawn to the United Church of Christ because as we say through the Still Speaking campaign, "no matter who you are or where you are on life's journey, you are welcomed here." We are a tradition of radical hospitality. The churches which are finding their ways to the UCC often have ministries that have drawn members from other Christian traditions where they have not been fully welcomed. They may have been told that their "difference was deficient." Perhaps they were divorced, or gay, or a woman called to ministry, or even a person of another race. To each of them, these churches have said, "you are welcomed here." In many of these churches there are boxes of tissues in the pews, because the word of God's acceptance and grace is so powerful, it brings worshippers to tears of gratitude.

In one of the churches that has begun a conversation with us about affiliation, the pastor, speaking of the United Church of Christ, announced, "there is somebody out there who wants us!" The congregation burst into applause. Easter reminds us that there is always a "somebody," a God, who wants us. God, who in the words of the United Church of Christ Statement of Faith, "shared our common lot, conquering sin and death and reconciled the whole creation to its Creator." Easter is the moment in the liturgical calendar when we recall the fullness of the reconciliation we know in Jesus Christ.

On the cross, in the tomb, and then in the dawn of Easter morning, we recall for fullness of God's sacrifice and love. We remember God's triumph over the grip of death and sin, and in the words of Paul, we rejoice that "neither life nor death, nor angels nor principalities, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, not anything else in all creation will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord!" May

your Easter be glorious, and may the light of God's love break forth for you and for all.

Peace,
Tim Downs

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UNITED CHURCH OF CHRIST**
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